

Flood Guidance: Dealing with residue silt and sediment in flooded areas

As homes and the ground dry out from the flood, the sediment that was deposited in homes or on the ground dries out, too. This dried sediment will contain particulate matter that can get into the air from wind or physical disturbance, such as sweeping. Some particulate matter gets trapped in the nose, while smaller particulate matter can enter the lungs. If very small particulate matter, less than 2.5 microns in diameter, are breathed in, some people may experience worsening of existing respiratory or heart conditions. Therefore, it is recommended to wear a dust mask when working in areas with dried sediment. This will keep the dried sediment from entering your nose or lungs.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is coordinating with federal and state emergency management agencies (FEMA and TEMA) and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation to assess the possibility of chemicals entering the floodwater from area tank farms, industries, and other facilities that store and use chemicals. According to the EPA's investigations, as of May 10, 2010 at 7:00 a.m., no major spills of chemicals have been identified. All agencies are continuing investigations and will oversee any hazardous material cleanup that may be required.

It is very likely that all flood water was contaminated with sewage. This could have an impact on the safety of garden vegetables. Vegetables that are in blossom or pre-blossom stage are safe to eat. Leafy vegetables, such as lettuce and spinach, that were covered with flood water are not safe to eat and should be discarded. In addition, hard to clean produce, such as strawberries, should be discarded. Vegetables that grow below the ground, such as carrots and potatoes, should be safe to eat if they are first washed, peeled, and cooked. If an unplanted field was flooded, let the soil dry enough to rework it before planting food crops. Produce from flood-damaged gardens should not be sold or used for home canning.

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Tennessee Department of Health
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